

# Ten Reasons Arts Education Matters

Elliott Seif, an educational consultant, author, Understanding by Design® cadre and ASCD Faculty member, and Educational Leadership contributor, shares 10 reasons why we should strengthen and expand arts education in a 21st century world, not reduce or eliminate it.

## **Arts education can increase student engagement.**

Let's face it—for the most part, children like arts education. It is hands-on, has immediate rewards, focuses on positive achievements, develops concrete products, and fosters collaboration. The arts provide many opportunities for students to show off and demonstrate their skills through authentic performance. The arts enable children to grow in confidence and learn how to think positively about themselves and learning.

## **Children learn positive habits, behaviors, and attitudes.**

Learning a musical instrument, creating a painting, learning to dance, or singing in a chorus teaches that taking small steps; practicing to get better at something; being persistent; and being patient, even in the face of adversity, are important for children's growth and improvement. Students gain confidence as they try to accomplish things that don't come easily. In other words, learning an artistic discipline helps young people develop character. Students learn habits, behaviors, and attitudes that are necessary for success in any field of endeavor.

## **The arts enhance creativity.**

Imagine classes in which students create original artwork filled with color that displays a creative use of space, they develop their own rhythms, or they write and produce their own plays. These classes provide a wonderful environment for fostering creativity, which is an important skill to have in a rapidly changing world.

## **Students sharpen their critical intellectual skills.**

The arts foster higher levels of thinking that carry over to learning other academic subjects as well as to life outside of school. Through the arts, children learn to observe (What do you see in a painting?); interpret (How should we play this music?); see different perspectives (What is the artist's perspective? What is your perspective?); analyze (Let's take apart this play and study each part separately); and synthesize (How do all the parts of the dance fit together to create a whole?).

## **The arts teach students methods for learning language skills.**

As students learn to read notes, compose music, play an instrument, memorize dance steps, create a painting, and act in a drama, they are also learning how to develop new concepts, build vocabulary, and understand a new language.

## **The arts help students learn mathematics.**

The arts require measurement, number manipulation, and proportional thinking, all of which foster mathematical thinking. Students also learn patterns (musical rhythms and dance patterns), spatial and geometric relationships (visual art patterns), and three-dimensional skills (making clay models).

## **The arts expand on and enrich learning in other subjects.**

Works of art provide a visual context for learning about historical periods. Music, painting, drama, and dance help literature come alive. Graphic designs and drawings, such as those made by inventors and engineers, complement learning about scientific and technological principles and innovations.

## **Aesthetic learning is its own reward.**

The arts teach young people about beauty, proportion, and grace. Students can examine conflict, power, emotion, and life itself. The power of the arts is in its wondrous ability to give us joy, help us understand tragedy, promote empathy, and make the written word come alive.

## **Students practice teamwork.**

In developing a theatrical production, group performance, or any type of collaborative artistic endeavor, students practice the fine art of teamwork. As they work together, they learn to understand differences and diversity and realize the ways that teamwork contributes to a great performance. By also teaching students how to live and work together, the arts contribute to making schools safer and more peaceful learning environments.

## **Arts education is just the beginning.**

The arts provide an important avenue where children can develop a passion for learning. Many children discover their talents and interests through the arts and are inspired to pursue careers in artistic fields.